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SUBJECT: MASS ARRESTS OF MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD MEMBERS IN
LEAD-UP TO LOCAL ELECTIONS

REF: CAIRO 389

¶1. (SBU) In the lead-up to Egypt's April 8 local council elections (reftel), dozens of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) activists are being arrested daily. An estimated 420-500 MB members have been detained in the past four weeks alone, mainly from cities across Egypt's Nile Delta, where popular support of the Islamist group is high. MB leaders assert that the government is targeting for arrest likely MB candidates in the upcoming elections, as well as campaign organizers and workers. Essam El Erian, a senior MB member, told journalists that, "The aim of it all is to prevent them (the MB) from entering the elections They don't want the Brotherhood to stand as candidates." Embassy contacts who are close to the MB have confirmed to us the MB's claim that most of the detainees were either potential MB candidates in the elections, or working on campaign organizing or "get out the vote" efforts. Egyptian security officials have been quoted in the press as saying that the detainees are accused of belonging to an illegal group, possessing anti-government literature, and organizing unauthorized meetings. (Note: The MB is technically an illegal organization in Egypt, although it holds twenty-percent of the seats in Egypt's People's Assembly. End note).

¶2. (SBU) In addition to the arrests, the MB is facing other hurdles in entering the local council elections. In order to register as a candidate, formal registration paperwork must be submitted to the local police station or local council office, together with a copy of a potential candidate's police record. To date, many MB-affiliated candidates have complained that police officials are not providing their police records, thereby making it impossible for them to register as candidates. On March 5, one potential MB candidate was reportedly beaten by "thugs" as he tried to enter the registration office of a village near Zagazig, to submit forms for his candidacy. Several MB detainees have announced that they will attempt to run in the elections even while imprisoned.

¶3. (SBU) We anticipate this wave of arrests to continue and perhaps increase as the elections draw closer. Tensions are high, as the ruling National Democratic Party strives to lay the groundwork for a crushing victory on April 8, and the MB, having taken the difficult decision to contest the elections, seems determined to somehow register candidates and run, despite the obvious high costs to the group and its members.
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